Mollenhoff, Rogers Clashed Over State Dept. Critics' List

6/16/70

By Ken W. Clawson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Outgoing White House investigator Clark Mollenhoff quarreled angrily with Secretary of State William P. Rogers over obtaining a list of 250 State Department employees who criticized President Nixon's action in Cambodia.

"I'm not going to say whether he shouted at me or I shouted at him," said Mollenhoff yesterday in a telephone interview from his summer home in Clarion, Iowa.

"My job requires you to be independent, to conduct investigations and to criticize from time to time. If I didn't, I would be a damn fool. People on all levels of government once in a while are going to disagree."

The confrontation took place after Mollenhoff officially requested on May 18 that State supply him with the names of 250 employees of the Department, the Agency for International Development, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency who signed a petition to Secretary Rogers opposing U.S. involvement in Cambodia.

State Department spokesman Carl E. Bartch said yesterday that Mollenhoff asked Deputy Under Secretary for Administration William B. Macomber for the list and that Macomber refused. Mollenhoff then obtained the names anyway from an undisclosed source in the Department.

The confrontation with Rogers ensued within a day of Mollenhoff's request for the names. Rogers reportedly told Mollenhoff to stop interfering in the internal affairs of his department.

It was the second time in the last few months that Mollenhoff and Rogers have tangled over probes by the White House aide into the State Department. Early this year, Mollenhoff indicated he was investigating State's handling of relief to Biafra. Rogers objected, and the White House subsequently ended the investigation.

Mollenhoff said yesterday his confrontation with Rogers over the list of Cambodia petition signers had "nothing to do with my resignation" announcement May 30. He will become Washington bureau chief of the Des Moines Register and Tribune.

Part of the Job

Mollenhoff, who is on two weeks vacation and will leave the administration to return to newspaper work in mid-July, said, "Traditionally, the ombudsman who does his job properly will be in an adversary position with a wide range of government officials and personnel. The role requires investigations."

But the White House yesterday said Mollenhoff had acted "on his own volition" in his quest for the names. Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Mollenhoff has not passed the list on to anyone at the White House, but he added, "He may."

Ziegler and Mollenhoff denied that a dossier is being compiled on the petition signers. Mollenhoff said, "The business about compiling dossiers is bunk, but there was a list." He refused to elaborate, adding, "I don't talk about my investigations."

Mollenhoff indicated he was in close touch with the White House on the controversy. "Ziegler will tell you all about it at the White House briefing," he said.

Data Fate Questioned

Ziegler was asked whether Mollenhoff will be taking secret FBI and tax information that he has acquired during his 10-month tenure as a White House aide when he leaves next month.

The press aide said he assumes "Mollenhoff will deal with the access he has had to government information in the same way members of past administrations have dealt with them." Ziegler said he would "strongly quarrel" with any indication that Mollenhoff was leaving the White House with extensive secret data he has compiled on the job.

Meanwhile, Ziegler said, Mollenhoff is "wrapping up his affairs" and is not starting any further probes in the administration.